

Although I've written a number of columns on alcohol racing, the largest number of our students come to us to learn how to bracket or Super category race. So this time I'll talk about one aspect of bracket racing this is very important and difficult to master.

The old adage "Races are won and lost at the starting line" is only partly true. As most bracket and super category racers know, many races are won and lost at the "finish line".

On any given race day at a good track nearly every driver is capable of running .02 seconds or less off a perfect light. These drivers have worked for years with reaction time training systems (practice trees) and on track practice during time trials and eliminations and, because of this practice, have perfected their starting line skills. It takes a great amount of effort just to stay competitive and is, in many cases, close to impossible to gain a big advantage on the starting line. Because of this parity on the starting line

it is often the driver that can “drive the finish line” the best that becomes the victor.

How do these drivers get so good at driving the finish line? Some just seem to inherently “know” how to do it while others have spent years practicing these techniques. But for many newer drivers it is an often misunderstood part of the track. They get little, if any, instruction from others and precious little practice time. If you think about it, practice time is so limited because time trials are always conducted on a heads up basis, so practicing the skills of chasing or being chased is impossible. And in Super Categories, drivers drive flat out during practice. This means that your only opportunity to practice is during eliminations and if you lost first round, you had only one practice run during the entire week!

To learn visual and mental skills such as these requires hundreds of repetitions. Some of the traveling professional bracket racers race 400 or 500 rounds per year. It’s easy to

see how they can develop a decided advantage in finish line driving skills.

But the driver that doesn't compete that often shouldn't be at a complete disadvantage. With the proper information and training this driver should be able to vastly improve his or her finish line driving skills.

The skills we are talking about are visual skills. Understanding your vision is very important. Your vision is divided into two areas. One is peripheral, the other focal. Your focal vision is a very small area and represents less than five degrees of what you actually see. Everything else is peripheral. If your eyesight is 20/20 (which is average, not perfect) it is only 20/20 in this very small window in the center of your vision. As you move from center your ability to recognize detail diminishes. In fact at an angle of 45 degrees off center your vision is 20/200, very poor. You may not understand this but there are tests you can perform to prove it.

Due to the fact that your vision is so limited, exactly where you look as you approach the finish line is important. And with proper training you will be able to use this focal vision to hone in on your opponent and to accurately assess their position.

The other function of vision necessary to develop to “drive the finish line” is dynamic visual acuity. This is not tested at your doctor’s office. Dynamic visual acuity is your ability to perceive relative motion and relative position.

Relative motion is the difference in speed between you and your opponent, or the speed by which you are catching your opponent or your opponent is catching you.

Relative position is the relationship between you, your opponent and the finish line or where you and your opponent are on the race track.

Another important element is to understand and predict where your opponent should be at a given point on the track preferably close to the finish line. By knowing this predicted position you will then have a better assessment of what is

happening in the race. We have developed a training method called the "one second out" rule that helps many newer drivers. To explain it simply, you need to establish a spot on the race track where you will be when you are one second from the finish line. This position of course depends on how fast your car is running. It will also be necessary to determine your opponent's speed and their estimated position one second from the finish line. Now during the race you will observe these positions at the "one second out" point and make your first assessment of how the race is going. There are many different scenarios that can take place during any particular race.

If the opponent is farther ahead than his or her predicted point, they could be fast, you could be slow, or you could have been late. If the opponent is behind the predicted point you could be fast, they could be slow or they were late. If the opponent is where you predicted it's going to be close.

This entire process can become very involved which is why the experienced drivers have such an advantage.

But as they say, "you've gotta start somewhere" and having a basic understanding of what is happening as you approach the finish line will help you win a few more rounds.

If you want to prepare for next seasons racing, we'd love to help... just give us a call.